

Moderates, Mennonites, and the Religious Right



Ellen Samuelson

The political contest in 1994 for the seventy-fourth Kansas house district in south-central Kansas brought two stunning surprises. The first came in the August Republican primary when a social conservative political newcomer, Cedric Boehr, upset the long-established moderate incumbent, Ellen Samuelson. The second surprise came in the November general election when Samuelson, a write-in candidate, turned the tables and defeated Boehr. It was the first and only time in Kansas political history that an incumbent legislator was re-elected to office despite having been defeated in the primary.¹

The Boehr-Samuelson contest was exceptionally rich in what it revealed about the Kansas social and political environment of the mid-1990s. The highly contested primary and general election demonstrated the rising power of the religious right wing of the Republican Party (Boehr), as well as the resiliency of the established Republican moderates (Samuelson). The Kansas Democratic Party underwent a precipitous decline from 1990 to 1994. In the legislature of 1991–1992 the Democrats held a bare majority of seats in the house of representatives (63–62), and a competitive minority in the senate (18–22). After the 1994 election the Democrats fell to roughly a third of the seats: 45–80 in the house and 13–27 in the senate.² The 1994 Boehr-Samuelson

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1. In 1978 in the eleventh legislative district (Bourbon and Crawford Counties), Steve Good won the Republican primary over Wayne Stringer. After the primary Good was arrested for shoplifting a carton of cigarettes. He pleaded guilty and attempted to withdraw from the race, but the deadline had passed. The Democrat nominee was Verl

Strong. Richard Harper, who had been the district's representative for fourteen years, ran as a write-in candidate and won the general election with 3,100 votes to 2,464 for Strong and 1,291 for Good. See "Write-in Candidate Harper Wins State Representative," *Fort Scott Tribune*, November 6, 1978.

2. Political pundits did not foresee the Democratic collapse. In a scholarly article written after the 1990 election, two political scientists predicted that the Democratic competitive position in the legislature "should continue for the foreseeable future." See Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis, "Kansas:

Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 27 (Autumn 2004): 180–193.

A Hot Contest in the Seventy-fourth House District, 1994

by James C. Juhnke

contest in the seventy-fourth district foreshadowed the emerging “three-party” shape of Kansas politics in the late 1990s and early 2000s: moderate Republican, conservative Republican, and Democrat.³ Any two of the three groups could combine to defeat the third. In the seventy-fourth district in 1994, the moderate Republicans and the Democrats combined to defeat the conservative Republican challenge.

The contest also demonstrated the political role of the Mennonite community in south-central Kansas—not only the relationship of Mennonites to the wider political community, but also the relationship of Mennonite moderates to Mennonite social conservatives and fundamentalists. Both candidates had Mennonite backgrounds and connections. Although Mennonites were a minority (25–30 percent) in the district, and although they did not agree politically among themselves, the leadership of politically active Mennonites was essential in determining the outcome of this election.⁴

In comparison with the national resurgence of religious conservatives in 1994, the political outcomes in Harvey County were strangely contradictory. On one hand, Republican conservatives in the seventy-fourth district seemed to be making major gains. Boehr won



Cedric Boehr

Two-Party Competition in a One-Party State,” in *Party Realignment and State Politics*, ed. Maureen Moakley (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 176.

3. Michael Smith, “Kansas, the Three-Party State,” *Campaigns & Elections* 24 (October/November 2003): 36–37. For additional information on the Christian right in Kansas politics, see Allan J. Cigler, Mark Joslyn, and Burdett A. Loomis, “The Kansas Christian Right and the Evolution of Republican Politics,” in *The Christian Right in American Politics: Marching to the Millennium*, ed. John Green, James Guth, and Clyde Wilcox (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 145–66; Loomis and Cigler, “After the Flood: The Kansas Christian Right in Retreat,” in *Prayers in the Precincts: The Christian Right in the 1998 Elections*, ed. Mark Rozell and Clyde Wilcox (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000), 227–42; Loomis and Cigler, “The Christian Right in Kansas,” in *God at the Grass Roots: The Christian Right and the 1996 Elections*, ed. Mark Rozell and Clyde Wilcox (Lanham, Md.: Rowan and Littlefield, 1998), 207–22.

4. Estimates are based upon Martin B. Bradley et al., *Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1990: An Enumeration by Region, State, and County, Based on Data Reported for 133 Church Groupings* (Atlanta: Glenmary Research Center, 1992), 159, 161, 163.

the Republican primary. Religious conservatives gained a majority of precinct committeemen and committeewomen in the Harvey County Republican primary and wrested control of the party from the traditional moderate leaders. On the other hand, the religious right did not make a clean sweep in Harvey County. Incumbent congressman Dan Glickman, a moderate Democrat, outpolled his challenger in the county, newcomer Todd Tiaht, a religious conservative. (Tiaht carried the other eleven counties in the fourth congressional district and defeated Glickman overall.) Ellen Samuelson's victory over Cedric Boehr in her write-in campaign demonstrated the resilience of the mainstream moderates. Virginia Iserhardt, a leading conservative Republican activist later complained, "Harvey County is harder to work in than many other places in Kansas. This is not a conservative county. I don't know why."⁵ One explanation has to do with the role of Mennonites in the politics of south-central Kansas.

The new religious right of the 1980s and 1990s grew rapidly. Religious conservatives had helped to elect Ronald Reagan president in 1980 and 1984. By the early 1990s conservative evangelicals had displaced mainline Protestants as the largest single constituency in the Republican Party.⁶ The election in 1992 of Bill Clinton, an openly pro-abortion and pro-gay-rights liberal, greatly energized religious conservatives. President Clinton attempted to govern as a bold leader, although he had been elected with only a 43 percent plurality. In his first days in office he defined his administration with a bungled attempt to change military policy regarding homosexuals. He proposed a far-reaching and complex reform of the health care system—and failed. By the time of the 1994 elections, the Democrats were vulnerable.⁷

Meanwhile the religious right was mobilizing. The Christian Coalition, led by Ralph Reed, doubled its membership in 1993, with nearly a million people listed as "donors and activists." Other national leaders included Paul Weyrich, James Dobson (Focus on the Family), Bill McCartney and Dave Waddell (Promise Keepers), and a

number of lesser-known Christian Reconstructionists who taught that the Bible, particularly Mosaic law, offered a blueprint for reconstructing the United States and the world.⁸

In the summer of 1991 Randall Terry of Operation Rescue organized an anti-abortion campaign in Wichita that lasted more than forty days and resulted in thousands of arrests. Terry's "Summer of Mercy" was directed against Dr. George Tiller, who had a reputation for performing late-term abortions. Cedric and Sandi Boehr had moved to Kansas in 1991 and attended rallies and other "Summer of Mercy" events. They were "shocked to learn that Kansas was known as a place to go for late-term abortions." By 1994, 4,245 non-Kansans came to Kansas for abortions.⁹

The seventy-fourth legislative district took in parts of three counties (Map 1). It included all of Harvey County, except for two townships in the center: Newton Township (including Newton, the county seat) and Macon Township, just to the west. Newton and Macon Townships constituted a separate seventy-second state legislative district, represented by a moderate Republican incumbent, Garry Boston.¹⁰ The seventy-fourth district also included six townships from the southern part of McPherson County and five townships from the western part of Butler County. It was a substantially rural district. Voters came from the countryside to vote in small towns. Only two of the towns, Halstead and Hesston, were large enough to require more than one voting precinct.

A distinguishing feature of the seventy-fourth district was its relatively high Mennonite population. In both Harvey and McPherson Counties Mennonites were more numerous than members of any other denomination. The district held twenty-six active Mennonite congregations, plus seven congregations in Newton and North Newton. Mennonites were between 25 and 30 percent of the total population in the district.¹¹ The Mennonite cultural influence far exceeded these numbers, however, because Harvey Coun-

5. Virginia "Jinny" Iserhardt, interview by author, September 23, 2003. For election results, see *Election Statistics, State of Kansas: 1994, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: Secretary of State, n.d.), 104, 136.

6. Glenn H. Utter and John W. Storey, *The Religious Right: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1995), 14. On the general vitality of American evangelicalism, see Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism, Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

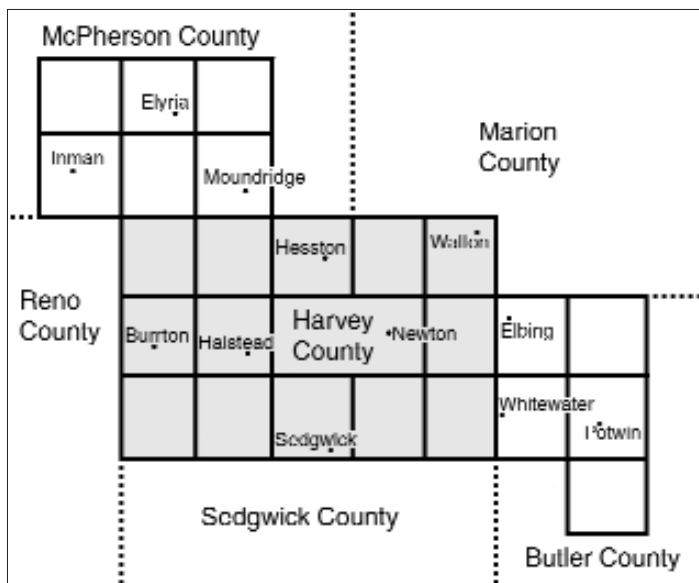
7. Robert W. Merry, "Voters' Demand for Change Puts Clinton on Defensive," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 52 (November 12, 1994): 3027; William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 329.

8. Jean Hardisty, *Mobilizing Resentment: Conservative Resurgence from the John Birch Society to the Promise Keepers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 13–17; Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*; Martin, *With God on Our Side*.

9. Cedric and Sandi Boehr, interview by author, March 22, 2002; Kansas Department of Health and Environment, "Annual Summary of Vital Statistics 1994," www.kdhe.state.ks.us/hci/vital94/preg.html

10. In the 1994 election Garry Boston survived a challenge by a Mennonite Democrat, Donna Neufeld. See *Election Statistics, State of Kansas: 1994*, 136.

11. Because the records of church membership are reported by counties and not by townships, it is not possible to determine an exact percentage of Mennonites in the seventy-fourth district. The estimates are based upon Bradley et al., *Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1990*, 159, 161, 163.



Map 1. The seventy-fourth district included townships from Harvey, Butler, and McPherson Counties.

MENNONITE GROUP	DENOMINATIONAL OFFICES	CONGREGATIONS IN 72d AND 74th DISTRICTS
General Conference Mennonite Church	Newton, Ks.	18
Church of God in Christ (Holdeman)	Moundridge, Ks.	5
Mennonite Church	Elkhart, Ind.	3
Mennonite Brethren	Hillsboro, Ks.	3
Evangelical Mennonite Church	Fort Wayne, Ind.	1
Independent (Emmaus, Garden, Swiss)		3
TOTAL NUMBER OF CONGREGATIONS		33

Table 1. Mennonite Congregations

ty was a denominational center with a strong institutional presence. The national headquarters of the General Conference Mennonite Church was located in downtown Newton. Bethel College, a four-year liberal arts college in North Newton, and Hesston College, a two-year college in Hesston, both contributed to the cultural and intellectual life of the community. In Newton also were the health institutions, Bethel Deaconess Hospital and Prairie View Mental Health Center, and a national Mennonite weekly newspaper, *Mennonite Weekly Review*. North Newton had a regional center for the Mennonite Central Committee, a service agency for relief and development, and Mennonite retirement homes for the elderly were found in Newton, Hesston, Moundridge, and Inman. In the mind of the public, south-central Kansas was Mennonite territory, and people routinely assumed that Mennonites were a majority in the area.¹²

The thirty-five Mennonite congregations (Table 1) all have distinctive historical and ethnic traditions, but they fall into three general categories. The largest group is the denominational progressives (General Conference, Mennonite Church, and Mennonite Brethren), who are identified with, and influenced by, their small liberal arts colleges in North Newton, Hesston, and Hillsboro. The progressives emphasize an ethic of peace and service that arose out of

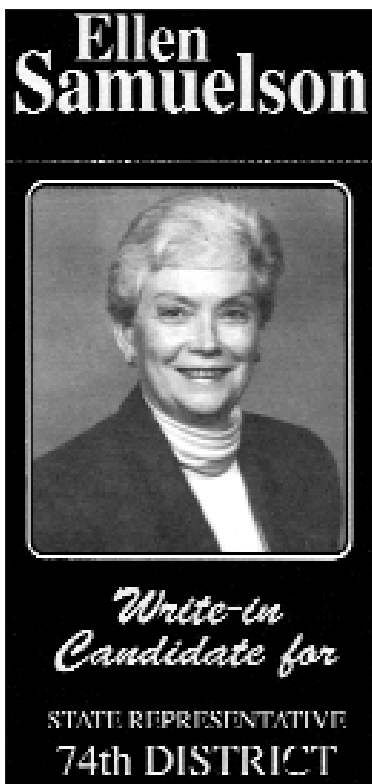
Anabaptist–Mennonite tradition and understanding of the Bible. A much smaller group, the conservative evangelicals (Evangelical Mennonite Church and the independents), are on the fringes of denominational organization. They are influenced by the anti-modernist, or fundamentalist, wing of American Protestantism. In a third category, appropriately labeled traditionalist evangelical, is a group named Church of God in Christ (Holdeman) Mennonite. The Holdeman Mennonites hold to a strictly regulated dress code; rejection of public schooling, modern entertainments, and mass media; and a revivalist piety. These people do not participate in politics and voting.¹³

Mennonites in Kansas had voted in elections from the time of their immigration in the 1870s. In 1908 Henry Peter Krehbiel, editor and pastor, was the first Mennonite elected to the Kansas legislature.¹⁴ In 1994 two other central Kansas Mennonites in addition to Cedric Boehr ran for legislative seats. Donna Neufeld of Newton, a social work teacher and family counselor, challenged Republican incumbent Garry Boston, in the seventy-second district (the city of Newton

12. Steven V. Foulke, *Shaping of Place: Mennonitism in South-Central Kansas* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1998); Miner and Valetta Seymour, interview by author, November 9, 2003.

13. Literature on North American Mennonite cultural and political identity is substantial. Especially notable are Leo Driedger and Leland Harder, eds. *Anabaptist–Mennonite Identities in Ferment* (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1990); Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking, From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1994); Driedger, *Mennonites in the Global Village* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

14. James C. Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites* (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1975), 42.



Following a career in teaching, Ellen Samuelson was elected to the Kansas legislature in 1988. Although she and her family (above) are Methodists, they have deep roots in the Mennonite faith and community.

plus Macon and Newton Townships). Duane Goossen, a Mennonite building contractor from Goessel, had served in the Kansas legislature twelve years and ran for re-election as a Republican in the seventieth district (primarily Marion County).¹⁵

Ellen Samuelson had served three terms in the Kansas House of Representatives. In 1992 she had won election over Democratic candidate Carol Becker by a margin of 5,525 to 3,007.¹⁶ In 1994 the seventy-fourth district Democrats, a weak minority party in any case, did not run a candidate in the primary election. They considered the sixty-three-year-old Samuelson unbeatable.

Samuelson had Mennonite roots, but she was a member of the United Methodist church in Hesston. Her grandfather, John F. Banman, had been excluded from the First Mennonite Church in Hillsboro when he joined the Masonic lodge. Samuelson's father, Alvin Banman, was a teacher. She graduated from high school in Centralia and went on to study home economics at Kansas State Univer-

sity in Manhattan. There she met and married (1952) Armin "Sam" Samuelson, who became a 4-H extension agent, first in Dickinson County and then in Harvey County. They lived in a rural home in Emma Township, between the towns of Newton and Hesston. In 1965 Samuelson renewed her teaching certificate and began teaching home economics at the junior high and high schools in Hesston. In 1979 she began teaching at Bethel College. She served as director for Bethel's "Life Enrichment" program, a position that put her in touch with many active senior citizens in the area. She continued at Bethel for six years.¹⁷

Samuelson's husband also had several decades of experience and contacts with Mennonite people and institutions. In the early 1950s Sam dealt with Mennonite farm families in his work as a 4-H extension agent. From 1956 to 1967 and again from 1974 to 1995 he worked at the Prairie View Mental Health Institution. His work in fund raising and institutional development allowed him to visit regularly with families and churches in Prairie View's Mennonite constituency. "Given all of our Mennonite connections," explained Methodist Sam Samuelson, "I sometimes say that Ellen and I are 'Methonites.'"¹⁸ These connections were primarily with the Mennonite main-stream—the denominational progressive center.

Samuelson was elected to the Kansas legislature in 1988, following the retirement of Harold Dyck, a Mennon-

15. *Election Statistics, State of Kansas: 1994*, 136; *Kansas Legislative Handbook* (Topeka: Government Research Service, 1993).

16. *Kansas Legislative Handbook* (1993); *Election Statistics, State of Kansas: 1992 Presidential Preference Primary, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: Secretary of State, n.d.), 155.

17. Ellen and Armin Samuelson, interview by author, November 16, 2000; *Kansas Legislative Handbook* (1993).

18. Samuelson interview.

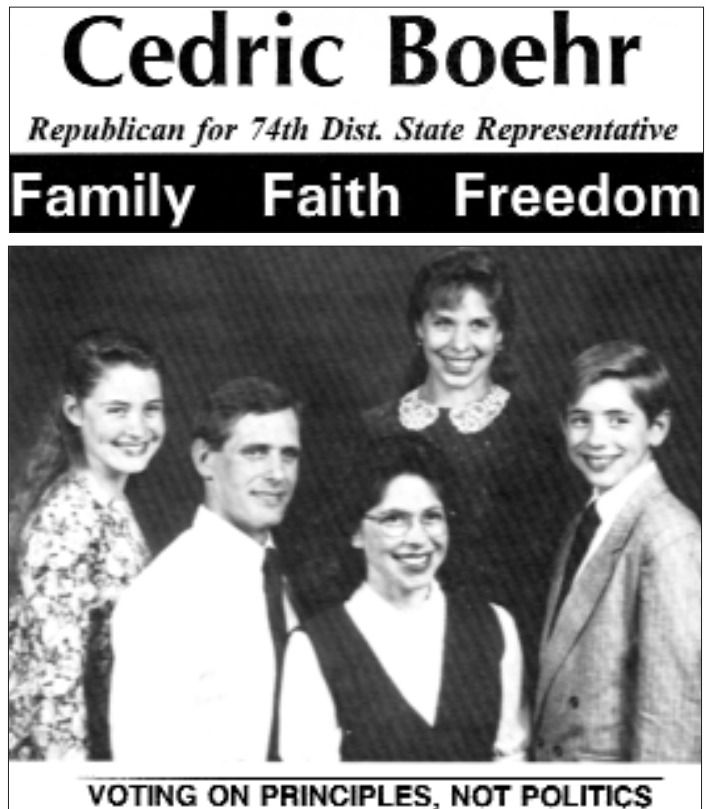
ite businessman from Hesston. She had never considered herself a politician, as she was hesitant about speaking before the public. But she was encouraged not only by Dyck but by the two women who were in the legislature. In a three-person race, she won the Republican nomination by thirty-five votes. Given the weakness of the Democratic Party in the district, winning the Republican primary was tantamount to election. She won again in the 1990 and 1992 Republican primaries against conservative challengers Mike Stieben and David Cundiff. In the 1993–1994 Kansas legislature she was on the Education Committee and the Public Health and Welfare Committee. She served as chairman of the Joint Committee on Children and Families.¹⁹

In 1994 the thirty-seven-year-old Cedric Boehr was a relative newcomer to central Kansas, but his roots in the Mennonite denomination were deep. The Boehr family had long been identified with the conservative evangelical wing of Mennonitism. Cedric's grandfather, Peter J. Boehr, had been a missionary in China. There he had clashed with other missionaries (such as Edmund G. Kaufman, later president of Bethel College) whom he considered to be liberal or modernistic. Cedric's father was professor of music at Grace Bible Institute in Omaha, Nebraska, a school founded in 1942 as a conservative evangelical alternative to Bethel College, the General Conference Mennonite liberal arts college in Kansas. Cedric attended Grace Bible Institute (today Grace University) where he met Sandra ("Sandi") Kenner. They were married in 1977 after each had attended Grace for a year and a half. In the following years they moved around frequently, with stops in Kansas, Minnesota, Alabama, Nebraska, and Wyoming. Cedric attended Hesston College (building trades) and the University of Wyoming (music education) without graduating from either school. He served in the U.S. Navy for four years, located near Washington D.C., and was a member of a navy band, the "Sea Chanters." They had three children, Heidi (born 1979), Evie (born 1981), and Isaac (born 1983). In 1991 the Boehrs moved to Kansas and bought a farmstead of fifteen acres, located a mile and half from the Emmaus Mennonite Church in western Butler County.²⁰

From the first year of their marriage, when they saw a movie *The Holocaust*, Cedric and Sandi were committed to

19. *Kansas Legislative Handbook* (1993); *Election Statistics, State of Kansas: 1990 Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: Secretary of State, n.d.), 81, 144; *Election Statistics, State of Kansas: 1988 Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: Secretary of State, n.d.), 61, 130.

20. Boehr interview.



Cedric Boehr frequently moved about the country and served in the U.S. Navy before coming to Kansas in 1991. His family has long been identified with the conservative wing of Mennonitism.

involvement with public issues. The movie, they said, "showed how Hitler was able to take over because the people were not involved. At that time we vowed to do what we could if we ever saw something similar in our own country." Their concern came to focus on the issues of abortion and education. While they were in Laramie, Wyoming, Sandi founded a pregnancy crisis center and Cedric wrote a conservative column for the student newspaper. Convinced that the public schools were not teaching basic reading and writing skills and were ignoring religious moral foundations, the Boehrs decided to home school their children.²¹

After they moved to Kansas in 1991 Cedric and Sandi Boehr participated in an anti-abortion demonstration. They met Virginia "Jinny" Iserhardt of Newton, who had a leading role in the religious conservative challenge to the Republican Party in Harvey County. Sandi Boehr and Jinny Iserhardt organized a pregnancy crisis center in Newton. In 1994 Sandi served as Cedric's campaign chairman, and Iserhardt, in her words, "worked my tail off for Cedric." Iser-

21. *Ibid.*

Boehr upsets Samuelson

Whitewater Republican likely to run unopposed in general for 74th District State House seat

By Brian Bowman
Newton Kansan

Cedric Boehr had a plan to unseat incumbent Ellen Banman Samuelson in the Republican 74th District primary.

"I tried to talk to every registered Republican voter," Boehr, of Whitewater, said moments after his stunning upset over Samuelson, who was seeking a fourth term. " ... That was the key."

Boehr's efforts may have been the reason he held his own in Samuelson's backyard — Harvey County — while winning by a con-

canvassed by the state Friday, was 1,598 votes for Boehr and 1,482 votes for Samuelson. More telling numbers in the county breakdowns show Boehr losing in Harvey County by just 57 votes, gaining 20 votes back in McPherson County before scoring a convincing 363-210 triumph in Butler County.

Boehr's pavement pounding brought out supporters in a primary where voter turnout was moderate at best. Samuelson had said weeks before the vote that a strong turnout would most likely help her. The turnout didn't materialize.

Samuelson, R-Heaston, released a



Although not expected to win, Boehr upset Samuelson in the August 2 Republican primary, defeating her by 107 votes. A photograph of Boehr and his wife, Sandi, appeared with this Newton Kansan article.

hardt also recruited religious conservative friends to run for Republican precinct committeeman and committeewoman positions. Cedric and Sandi were members of the Emmaus Mennonite Church east of Newton, and Jinny and her husband, Kermit, had attended the Bible Baptist Church in Newton. The Iserhardts joined the newly formed Grace Community (EMC Mennonite) congregation when the Baptist congregation discontinued in 1987.²²

For the August primary, Cedric and Sandi Boehr ran what they called a "sleeper campaign," avoiding publicity. They knew Ellen Samuelson's supporters considered her unbeatable, and they wanted to keep them thinking that way. Their campaign strategy was to knock on the doors of every registered Republican in the district. A dog bit Cedric on his first night of door-to-door campaigning—"not a good beginning." He handed out brochures stating his positions on key issues such as education and abortion, simply introduced himself, and asked for votes rather than raising issues verbally. On the basis of responses, he developed a card file of each contact indicating with potential supporters, opponents, and those somewhere between. The Boehrs made many new friends and followed up the potential supporters to enlist their volunteer campaign work. In the town of Sedgwick Cedric Boehr met "about five homemakers, possibly in their late twenties and thirties" who decided to campaign energetically for him. He also found some supporters in the town of Moundridge and with rural folk who attended Grace Community Church south of Newton and Garden Church south of Moundridge, both of which were conservative evangelical congregations.²³

The Boehrs's "sleeper campaign" worked to perfection. No one in Ellen Samuelson's campaign imagined she could lose the primary. She had won by increasing margins in 1988, 1990, and 1992, and her supporters thought she surely would not be vulnerable to a relatively unknown outsider who had recently moved to the district. Samuelson insists that she was not overconfident. She had gotten enough information to know that Cedric Boehr was busy and working hard. But when she warned her supporters of potential problems, they chided her for being too cautious or worried.²⁴ Doug Anstaett, editor of the *Newton Kansan*, told her she had "nothing to worry about from Cedric Boehr."²⁵ After the primary election, some of her friends apologized to her for having failed to vote. Samuelson was frustrated that Boehr's late negative newspaper advertisements had, in her view, misrepresented her position on abortion and other issues. She had not had time to respond.²⁶

During the primary campaign, Samuelson raised and spent about twice as much money as did Boehr. According to the official financial reports, by July 25 contributors had given \$8,971 to Samuelson and \$4,282 to Boehr. All of Boehr's contributors were individuals. Most of Samuelson's money came from political action committees, such as the Kansas Livestock Association, Kansas Bankers Association, and the Kansas Contractors Association.²⁷

22. Iserhardt interview.

23. Boehr interview.

24. Samuelson interview.

25. Doug Anstaett to author, November 3, 2003.

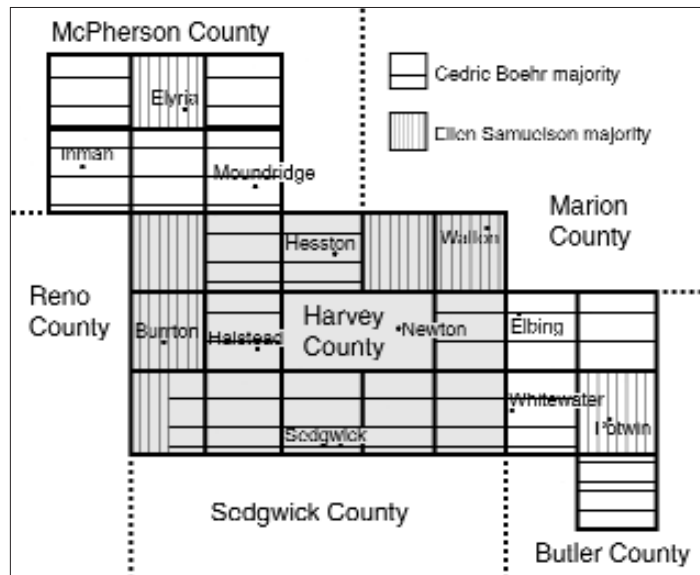
26. "Boehr upsets Samuelson," *Newton Kansan*, August 3, 1994.

27. Reports by Ellen Samuelson and Cedric Boehr, "Receipts and Expenditures Report of a Candidate for State Office," July 25, 1994; Kansas Commission on Governmental Standards and Conduct, personal reports of Ellen Samuelson, private collection of James C. Juhnke, North Newton, Kansas.

Boehr won the August 2 Republican primary by a margin of 107 votes, 1,591 to 1,484. The voter turnout in the primary was about the same as in 1990 and 1992, but less than half of the total voter turnout in the November general election of 1994. (Low voter turnout in primary elections is an advantage for “sleeper” campaigns.) Samuelson won in the Harvey County precincts by just 57 votes. Boehr won in McPherson County by 20 votes and convincingly in Butler County, where he lived, 354–210. Boehr showed surprising strength in the two Hesston City precincts, where he garnered nearly 40 percent of the votes. A map of seventy-fourth district votes by precincts shows that both candidates had supporters throughout the district—in Butler, Harvey, and McPherson County precincts (Map 2).²⁸

In the primary election the Republican religious conservatives in Harvey County won enough races for precinct committeemen and women to narrowly take control of the party away from the moderates, who had long been in power. Virginia Iserhardt was elected chairperson of the party in Harvey County. The conservatives also took control of the Butler County Republican Party, and Sandi Boehr was elected chairperson there. Iserhardt and Boehr participated in regional and state party meetings as conservatives took over the Republican Party in the state of Kansas. The stage was set for “something of a civil war between the newly ascendant conservatives, led by state party Chairman David D. Miller, and the traditional social moderates, headed by [newly elected] Governor [Bill] Graves and symbolized by the party’s popular Senator [Nancy Landon] Kassebaum.”²⁹

In an editorial on September 14 Anstaett offered news for any *Newton Kansan* readers who “thought this fall was going to be dull.” Anstaett predicted a “high-energy fall campaign.”³⁰ He was right. The Boehr and Samuelson campaigns geared up for an unprecedented level of campaign activity. The Samuelson campaign center was in Hesston, where John Waltner, the town’s Democratic mayor, and Vernon Nikkel, a Republican businessman, served as co-chairmen. Waltner was a member of the Bethel College Mennonite Church in North Newton, and Nikkel, a former Mennonite, was a member of the United Methodist Church in Hesston. They raised “about \$35,000”



Map 2. Candidate support by precinct in the primary election. Samuelson won the towns of Hesston and Halstead.

for the campaign, with more individuals contributing than in the primary. Ellen and Armin Samuelson did not need to put their own money into the effort.³¹

Both campaigns mobilized extensive door-to-door leafleting, newspaper advertising, letters to editors, yard signs, and public meetings. Boehr had a campaign minivan with the slogan “FAMILY VAN FOR THE FAMILY MAN.” The Samuelson campaign slogan was “Don’t Write Her Off; Write Her In.” The absence of a Democratic candidate was an advantage for Samuelson. Some writers of letters to the editor identified themselves as “Democrat for Samuelson.” Oswald Goering, a Democrat from Moundridge who contributed to Samuelson’s campaign, offered a note of humor in a letter to the editor: “I did ask Ellen to cash the check after dark as I did not want my Democrat friends to know that I was supporting a Republican.”³² Boehr’s great advantage, of course, was that his would be the only name printed on the ballot.

The first contested issue was the “Back the Winner” campaign pledge. During the primary, the Republican Party had asked the candidates to sign a “Back the Winner” form that stated, “Recognizing that Republicans must work together to win elections at all levels of government service, I hereby pledge to support the winner of the primary in which I am a candidate. I also acknowledge that by refus-

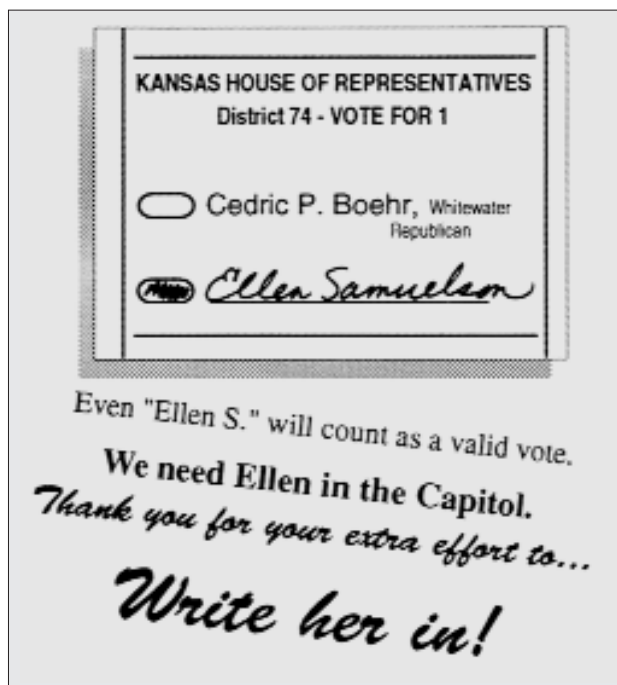
28. *Elections Statistics, State of Kansas: 1994*, 80.

29. “Abortion Foes March to Victory in Primaries and Platform,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 54 (August 10, 1996), 2263. Anti-abortion conservatives had control of the Republican Party in Kansas for four years, from after the election of 1994 until after the election of 1998.

30. Doug Anstaett, “You thought this fall was going to be dull,” *Newton Kansan*, September 14, 1994.

31. Samuelson interview.

32. Oswald and Elaine Goering, letter to the editor, *Harvey County Independent* (Halstead), August 24, 1994; Samuelson campaign clipping notebook, private collection of Ellen Samuelson, Newton, Kans.



The moderates responded to the August 2 primary loss by supporting Samuelson as a write-in candidate. Her campaign slogan said: "Don't Write Her Off; Write Her In." However, one of the first campaign issues became the "Back the Winner" pledge, which Samuelson had signed. In the minds of Boehr supporters, Samuelson's decision to run as a write-in candidate demonstrated a lack of integrity.



ing to sign and return the pledge, I may be exempting my campaign from consideration for assistance by the Kansas Republican Party." Cedric Boehr had refused to sign the pledge. As a matter of conscience, he said, he would not be able to support someone with Samuelson's voting record on moral issues. Samuelson had signed the pledge, as she had in earlier years. When she decided to run in the general election as a write-in candidate, the Boehr campaign put out a flyer and advertisement with a photocopy of Samuelson's "Back the Winner" signature. Her decision to run a write-in campaign, Cedric and Sandi Boehr believed, demonstrated a lack of integrity.³³

John Waltner, co-chairman of Samuelson's campaign, argued that the purpose of the "Back the Winner" pledge was to keep Republican candidates from supporting Democratic candidates. In this case there was no Democratic candidate. Whatever the election results, Waltner wrote, Samuelson would remain a more loyal Republican than Boehr, who was applying a standard to which he himself did not hold.³⁴

By mid-August, just two weeks after the primary, the Samuelson campaign got a boost from a controversial incident at the Grace Hill Mennonite Church, seven miles east of Newton. Before the primary, Grace Hill members had arranged for Samuelson to speak at a Sunday morning combined Sunday School class on August 7, four days after the primary election. She was to address matters related to health and welfare. When Samuelson announced her write-in campaign, Sandi Boehr called a Grace Hill member, Olin Claassen, to suggest that this had now become a political event and that the church should also invite Cedric Boehr. Claassen understood Sandi Boehr to say that the Boehrs would challenge the tax-exempt status of the congregation if the church proceeded as originally planned.³⁵ In face of this perceived threat, the congregation contacted Samuelson, who agreed to cancel the engagement.

Sandi Boehr denied that she had threatened the congregation's tax-exempt status or had even said anything about that possibility in her telephone contacts with Claassen. Doug Anstaett wrote an editorial asserting that Grace Hill "had a right to hear who it invited."³⁶ Anstaett

33. Boehr interview.

34. Charla Gatz, "Fur Flies, GOP pledge at center of controversy," *McPherson Sentinel*, September 21, 1994.

35. Olin and Carol Claassen, interview by Samuel Schrag, February 3, 2002. Bethel College Oral History Collection, Bethel College, North Newton, Kans. (hereafter cited as Oral History Collection).

36. Doug Anstaett, "Church had a right to hear who it invited," *Newton Kansan*, August 17, 1994. Brian Bowman, a reporter from the *Newton Kansan*, caught wind of the issue and wrote the article, "Boehr campaign brings up church's tax exempt status," for the August 17 issue.

was a moderate Republican, and this incident gave him an opportunity to take sides in the upcoming campaign. Cedric and Sandi Boehr later viewed the incident as a key turning point in the campaign. "In order to get a write-in campaign going," they said, "there had to be an issue to get the people angry."³⁷

The Boehr and Samuelson campaigns generated a blizzard of letters to editors of newspapers in the seventy-fourth district and those outside the district. Jerry Davis, publisher of the *Ledger*, a weekly paper serving Buhler, Inman, and Moundridge, reported that he had received more than seventy letters. "Obviously, there was not enough room to publish them all."³⁸ Wichita was outside of the seventy-fourth district, but the *Wichita Eagle* ran more letters to the editor from the Samuelson-Boehr campaign than from any legislative district in the city. In the three weeks before the general election, the *Newton Kansan* ran fifty-four letters on the Samuelson-Boehr contest (in addition to many letters on the Boston-Neufeld contest in the seventy-second district). Half of the letters were written by Mennonites—on both sides. Religious language and biblical quotations marked letters to the editor from both campaigns. Ray Smallwood of Inman caught the tone of the religious right in his support for Boehr: "Folks, he's a committed Christian, committed to the Lord, to his family, and to bringing good old solid Christian values, ethics and commitment to Kansas."³⁹ Jack Stauffer of Newton complained that the pro-Boehr "lynch mob" was smearing Samuelson as a "liberal": "I truly believe those of the Religious Right would have called Jesus a liberal, too, if they would have been there when he gave 'The Sermon on the Mount' or when he met 'The Woman at the Well.'"⁴⁰ On the eve of the election, the *Wichita Eagle* editors expressed their frustration with the religious right in an editorial titled "Devilish": "Jesus himself felt the temptation of political power when Satan offered him the kingdoms of the world. But Christ rejected Satan's offer. The

Devilish The religious right and New Age find a common cause in politics

Although associated with conservative Christians, the so-called religious right is proving to be quite ecumenical. Indeed, some groups linked to the religious right are even consorting with a leading figure in the New Age movement.

On the West Coast, the Traditional Values Coalition, comprised mostly of conservative Christian churchgoers, has endorsed California Republican Rep. Michael Huffington in his U.S. Senate battle against Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

A major issue in the California Senate campaign has been Mr. Huffington's wife, Ariana, and her connection with a New Age group whose leader proclaims himself to be more important than Jesus Christ.

In her book, "The Fourth Instinct: The Call of the Soul," Mrs. Huffington describes herself as a New Age pilgrim. "In the whole of human history there have never been so many avenues to inner conscious-

ness being explored . . . Rolling, rebirthing, past-life regressions. I personally have sampled a substantial variety of what is available including fire walking," she wrote.

In a review of the Huffington book, the conservative *National Review* noted that Mrs. Huffington's ideas differ greatly from the traditional biblical theology espoused by many people in the religious right.

The alliance in the Huffington campaign between New Age mystics and Christian activists is another example that politics makes strange bedfellows. It also shows that some conservative Christian groups are willing to sacrifice religious principles for political influence.

Jesus himself felt the temptation of political power when Satan offered him the kingdoms of the world. But Christ rejected Satan's offer. The devil seems to have had better luck with some members of the religious right.

Area newspapers received a flood of letters to the editor expounding on the religious views and convictions of both Boehr and Samuelson. On the eve of the election the Wichita Eagle expressed its frustrations with the religious right in an editorial entitled "Devilish," stating, in part, "Jesus himself felt the temptation of political power when Satan offered him the kingdoms of the world. But Christ rejected Satan's offer. The devil seems to have had better luck with some members of the religious right."

devil seems to have had better luck with some members of the religious right."⁴¹

Abortion was the most hotly disputed issue in letters to editors. Kristin Kliever connected Samuelson to George Tiller's abortion clinic in Wichita: "Ellen Samuelson is endorsed by our state's most liberal pro-abortion group, Pro-Choice Action League. This group is the personal lobbying arm of George Tiller's late term abortion business."⁴² Virginia Iserhardt wrote that Samuelson in the Kansas legislature had voted "nay" on three pro-life amendments to HB 2778, the "defining bill in the Kansas House."⁴³ On the other side, Adolf Neufeld of Inman wrote that Samuelson's support of HB 2778 was to restrict abortion: "Many of us would have liked a bill restricting abortion even more but this was a lot better than no control at all which was what we had before . . . She has never voted for a bill to permit abortion."⁴⁴ Samuelson claimed to be "pro-life," but she said she

37. Boehr interview.

38. Jerry Davis, "Political Reflections," *Ledger* (Moundridge), November 5, 1994.

39. *Wichita Eagle*, November 5, 1994; see also letters to editor, *ibid.*, November 1–10, 1994.

40. *Newton Kansan*, September 3, 1994; Samuelson campaign clippings notebook.

41. *Wichita Eagle*, November 7, 1994, 12A.

42. *Harvey County Independent*, September 29, 1994; Samuelson campaign clippings notebook.

43. *Newton Kansan*, November 2, 1994.

44. *Ibid.*, November 3, 1994.

was not willing to vote for pro-life legislation that was sure to be declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Paul F. Rosell, in a letter to the *Ledger*, wrote that her claim to be pro-life was “an obvious falsehood that all voters should find deplorable.”⁴⁵

Official Mennonite teaching opposed abortion, military service, and capital punishment. Joe Friesen, from Towanda, linked pro-life issues in a typical Mennonite way: “I would like to tell him [Boehr] that Mennonites value all of life and don’t care much for the death penalty, neither do they like the idea of carrying concealed weapons. We Mennonites attempt to live the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5).”⁴⁶ If Mennonites were upset that Boehr had abandoned the Mennonite teaching against military service by joining the U.S. Navy, they did not say so in public. This was not a politically marketable issue for a pacifist minority.

Funding for public education also was a major issue. Boehr proposed tax credits for people who schooled their children at home. He also proposed a more foundational reform—ending state aid to public education. Each local board of education would decide individually how to offset the loss of state aid.⁴⁷ Leroy and Ramona Busenitz of Elbing wrote in a letter to the editor, “Cedric doesn’t believe in human secularism, but rather holds . . . that parents have primary control in raising their family.”⁴⁸ Dorothy Smith of Newton made up an insulting name for Samuelson as she linked the school finance and abortion issues: “The state has control over school finance. Auntie El voted for it! Kansas is quickly becoming known as the abortion capital of the nation. . . . A vote for Auntie El is a vote for abortion.”⁴⁹ The Samuelson campaign warned that Boehr’s program would be a disaster for public education. Their leaflets and newspaper advertisements listed the percentage of state funds in local school budgets that would be lost under Boehr’s proposal—from 69 percent in Moundridge to 84 percent in Sedgwick. Letters to the editor noted that the Boehrs home schooled their own children. Barbara Roux of Moundridge put it condescendingly, “Mr. Boehr should not be in a position to vote himself a tax break.”⁵⁰

When Boehr claimed in his campaign announcement and leaflet that he was a “veteran of the Gulf War,” he left an opening for criticism. He had been in the navy during the Persian Gulf War of 1991 but not in a combat zone. Carl C. Krehbiel of Moundridge, a retired army lieutenant colonel

whose father had left the Mennonites when he joined the military in World War II, explained in detail why Boehr’s claim was offensive to him: “Unfortunately, there have always been some individuals who attempt to embellish their resumes by exaggerating their military service records, or claiming to have served, when in fact they did not. Such behavior is reprehensible, and, to those of us who are genuine war veterans, extremely disgusting. I believe that characterizing Cedric Boehr as a ‘Gulf War veteran’ is wrong.”⁵¹

Campaign organizers on both sides prepared packets to help people write letters to newspapers and to make sure the letters would keep appearing throughout the campaign. Many letters were personal endorsements of the candidates’ characters. Walter Busenitz of Whitewater wrote that he had known Cedric Boehr for twenty years, that he had studied under Boehr’s father in college, and that he could vouch for Cedric’s integrity and values.⁵² Milford and Rosie Roupp of Hesston wrote, “Our own four daughters were taught by Ellen through their high school years in Hesston High School. Each one has nothing but praise for ‘Mrs. Sam’s’ gifts of teaching, her high morals and religious values.”⁵³

Both candidates claimed that the opposing campaigns had misrepresented their positions. Two days after the primary election someone threw nails onto the driveway of the Boehrs’s rural home.⁵⁴ Letters from Whitewater, Hesston, and Inman complained that Samuelson’s yard signs had been vandalized. John Waltner and Vernon Nikkel wrote that although “several of Samuelson’s billboards and yard signs have been damaged, defaced, destroyed or stolen,” their candidate had urged her supporters not to retaliate in kind. Sandi Boehr wrote a letter asking supporters not to engage in vandalism.⁵⁵

Boehr took an early but small lead as the first vote results came in. The final tally was delayed because the seventy-fourth district extended into three counties and the votes were tabulated in three courthouses. The morning *Wichita Eagle* on November 9 said the race was still too close to call: “Boehr holds lead in 74th. Write-in keeps Samuelson close.”⁵⁶ The final tally eventually showed Samuelson with a comfortable majority. She garnered 4,118

45. *Ledger*, November 3, 1994; Samuelson interview.

46. *Newton Kansan*, November 4, 1994.

47. *Wichita Eagle*, November 9, 1994.

48. Unidentified clipping, Samuelson campaign clippings notebook.

49. *Newton Kansan*, November 4, 1994.

50. *Ibid.*, October 26, 1994.

51. Undated clipping, *McPherson Sentinel*, Samuelson campaign clippings notebook. In 1998 Carl C. Krehbiel was elected to the Kansas legislature from the seventy-fourth district.

52. *Wichita Eagle*, November 1, 1994.

53. *Newton Kansan*, November 2, 1994.

54. Boehr interview.

55. *Wichita Eagle*, November 2, 1994; *Newton Kansan*, October 27, 1994; Boehr interview.

56. *Wichita Eagle*, November 9, 1994.

votes (54 percent) to Boehr's 3,435 (46 percent). As in the August primary, a map of the district shows a strongly contested race, with neither candidate dominating a region (Map 3). Although he lost overall, Boehr actually increased his percentage of votes in four precincts. The voter turnout was high: 71 percent of registered voters.⁵⁷

Cedric and Sandi Boehr believed that the election was fraudulently stolen and that they could have had the result overturned if they had taken it to court. They said they had testimony that some election officials had helped voters write out Samuelson's name on the ballot, that some people voted more than once, and that "in Whitewater people were actually campaigning at the polling place—in the foyer of the building."⁵⁸ But they decided against a legal challenge. Boehr wrote a letter to the newspaper congratulating Samuelson on her victory and forgiving her and her staff "for what was said and done." The Boehrs were encouraged that, despite their own defeat, conservative Republicans had been swept into office elsewhere in Kansas and throughout the nation.⁵⁹

After the election the Boehrs took active roles in the newly ascendant conservative wing of the Kansas Republican Party. They served on the party state committee and in 1996 helped write a conservative platform for the party. By 1998, however, they were disillusioned with the Republican Party and decided to leave and join the U.S. Taxpayers Party (after 1999 the Constitution Party). Boehr became chairman of the Constitution Party for Kansas. In 1998 he was on the ballot for lieutenant governor and received 3 percent of the vote. His wife was on the ballot for secretary of state and was endorsed in the Christian Coalition guide. She earned 7 percent of the vote.⁶⁰

Ellen Samuelson returned to the Kansas legislature but not to the good graces of the new conservative Republican

Samuelson comes back to win

Successful write-in race only second in Kansas House history

By Bill Wilson
Newton Kansan

History was made Tuesday night in the 74th District in the Kansas House of Representatives.

For only the second time in state history, and the first time since 1988, a write-in candidate has prevailed over an elected party nominee in a House race. Incumbent Republican Ellen Samuelson rebounded from her surprising defeat at the hands of challenger Cedric Boehr in

More results inside

Page 5: National races
Page 12: Other local races, voter turnout, voting in Harvey County
Page 17: Statewide races
Page 18: Kids Voting

just before midnight, a raucous celebration ensued at the downtown Heceton headquarters of the Committee to Re-Elect

On election night Boehr took an early lead, and by the following morning the race was still too close to call. The final tally, however, eventually favored Samuelson with a comfortable majority. The above headline was printed in the November 9 issue of the Newton Kansan.

leadership. She lost her positions on the Education and the Health and Welfare Committees and was assigned less prestigious committees. Along with other Republican moderates, including Duane Goossen and Fred Gatlin, she was assigned an office on the relatively inaccessible fifth floor of the statehouse. Tim Shallenberger, leader of the newly dominant Republican conservatives in the Kansas house, resisted calls that Samuelson be expelled from the Republican Caucus, although the executive committees of the reorganized Butler County and Harvey County Central Committees had submitted petitions against her. Sandi Boehr, chairperson of the Butler County Central Committee, said the petition was for a "Republican house cleaning. As anyone knows, a house needs regular cleaning and upkeep in order to remain livable."⁶¹ In 1998, after having served five terms in all, Samuelson decided not to run for re-election.⁶² She remained an active spokesperson and campaigner for the moderate wing of the Republican Party in Harvey County and in the state of Kansas.

In the immediate wake of the November 1994 election, one expert surveyed the conservative Republican sweep and wrote of an "electoral meteorite that slammed into the American political landscape November 8."⁶³ The meteorite of November 1994 surely did reshape

57. "Samuelson comes back to win," *Newton Kansan*, November 9, 1994; *Election Statistics, State of Kansas: 1994*, 136.

58. Boehr interview.

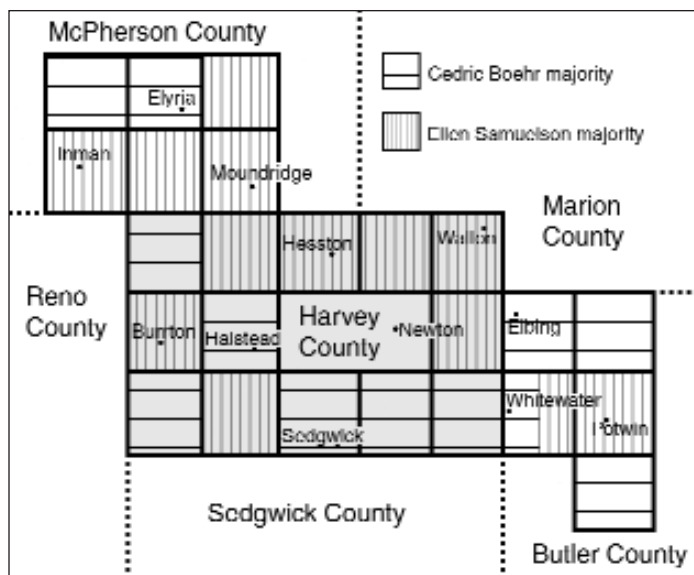
59. Cedric Boehr, "No regrets in hard-fought race," unidentified clipping, Samuelson campaign clippings notebook. Boehr's letter was quoted in *Newton Kansan*, November 9, 1994. Samuelson said her campaign had assigned poll watchers for many precincts. Rather than campaigning, they were keeping track to make sure that Samuelson supporters would show up to vote.

60. Boehr interview; *Election Statistics, State of Kansas, 1998* (Topeka: Secretary of State, n.d.), 104, 107.

61. Sandi Boehr, letter to the editor, *Newton Kansan*, December 14, 1994; Julie Wright, "Rep's status with GOP disputed," *Wichita Eagle*, December 3, 1994; Doug Anstaett, "So, just what 'principle' are they following now?" *Newton Kansan*, December 6, 1994.

62. Samuelson easily won the three-way contest for GOP nomination in 1996 and defeated "write-in" candidate Bud Schwindt to win re-election in November by a margin of 6,454 to 163. See *Election Statistics, State of Kansas: 1996, Primary and General Elections* (Topeka: Secretary of State, n.d.), 84, 183.

63. Merry, "Voters' Demand for Change Puts Clinton on Defensive," 3207.



Map 3. Seventy-fourth district general election results by precinct. Samuelson won the towns of Hesston and Halstead.

the political balance of forces in Kansas. In the context of the newly surging power of the religious right, the results in the Kansas seventy-fourth district demand explanation. Cedric Boehr's stealth campaign and victory in the August primary fit the state and national pattern of conservative religious insurgency. The Christian Coalition explicitly had recommended that conservative candidates enter political races under the radar screen. But how was it possible for Ellen Samuelson to return and win the November general election as a write-in candidate—an unprecedented feat in Kansas politics? How could a moderate Republican win this upset in a region that was so deeply religious?

Many factors contributed to the result. Important was the fact that the Democrats had not nominated a candidate and did not have a name on the ballot. In 1992 Samuelson's Democratic opponent, Carol Becker, had received 3,007 votes (35 percent of the total). Although some of those Democrats may have voted for Boehr in 1994, it is likely that a strong majority voted for Samuelson. John Waltner, Democratic co-chair of Samuelson's campaign, was an influential figure in the local Democratic Party. In this 1994 campaign Waltner, along with like-minded Democrats in the seventy-fourth district, pre-figured the emerging "three-party" dynamics of Kansas politics. Democrats generally were too weak to elect their own candidates but could wield great influence (and sometimes elect one of their own) by combining forces with either the moderate or the conservative wing of the Republican Party. Four

years later, in 1998, Waltner ran for the seventy-fourth district legislative seat and secured 46 percent of the vote.⁶⁴

Also important were the popularity and leadership qualities of Ellen Samuelson and her savvy and energetic husband, Armin. Cedric Boehr was a newcomer, not well known in the district, and his principled positions on the issues, especially abortion and school financing, were far to the right.

And yet the result cannot fully be explained apart from the character of the Mennonite community that was the strongest religious and cultural force in the rural seventy-fourth district. Like many Protestant denominations in the United States, the Mennonites were divided along conservative evangelical and progressive denominational lines. The conservative evangelicals were energized by Cedric Boehr's campaign, but they were a minority concentrated in a few congregations—Emmaus and the Swiss Church of Whitewater, the Garden Township Church, the Grace Community Church south of Newton, and the small Hopefield Mennonite Church in McPherson County. Nor were members of these congregations unanimous. Nick and Pauline Toews, members of the Emmaus Church, for example, were among the most energetic and dedicated workers in the Samuelson campaign.⁶⁵

The large majority of Mennonites in the seventy-fourth district were not strongly attracted by the agenda and style of the religious right. The pastors, Sunday School teachers, and other leaders in these congregations, for the most part, had attended the Mennonite liberal arts colleges. John Waltner, the campaign co-chairman, was the son of Mennonite missionaries in India. Waltner had graduated from Bethel College and was moved to express his Christian ideals through civic involvement. Monica and David Flask, members of the First Mennonite Church at Halstead, hosted an open house for Samuelson at their home and raised six hundred dollars for her campaign. Mennonite women Agnes Harder, Dorothy Wiebe, and Gladys Reimer hosted Samuelson at a "Berean Craft Day" in the heart of the Butler County religious conservative territory. John Waltner said that Mennonites were "sophisticated voters who, while they don't abandon their heritage, are not adamant about their morality."⁶⁶ Mennonites generally did oppose

64. Waltner's Republican opponent in the 1998 election was Carl Krehbiel of Moundridge, more a moderate than a conservative. Ellen Samuelson supported Krehbiel in that election. Samuelson interview.

65. Nick and Pauline Toews, interview by Keith Sprunger, March 15, 2000, Oral History Collection.

66. John Waltner, interview by Samuel Schrag, January 24, 2000, *ibid.*

abortion, but they expressed that opposition in ways more akin to the style of Ellen Samuelson than to that of Cedric Boehr. Most Mennonites in south-central Kansas identified with their denominational mainstream establishment. Boehr seemed to challenge from a different position, inasmuch as Omaha's Grace Bible Institute had long stood outside the General Conference Mennonite denominational majority.⁶⁷ The Boehr-Samuelson campaign of 1994 revealed the character of the Mennonite community and how that community involved itself in local politics.

In the wake of the seventy-fourth district race of 1994, two prominent Mennonite educators and denominational leaders, representing two poles of Mennonite church life and thought, offered their concluding reflections in letters to the *Newton Kansan*. Dr. Robert Kreider, former president of Bluffton College (Ohio) and teacher at Bethel College, spoke for the Mennonite denominational mainstream, the moderate religious folk who were in control of the church colleges, church bureaucracy, and benevolent institutions. Kreider wrote that the Samuelson campaign "symbolizes what this country now urgently needs: a coalition that seeks common ground." With the Democrats demoralized and the Republicans "threatened by angry radicals of the right," Samuelson and her supporters "have taught us that there is an alternative to extremism, apathy and cynicism. They have modeled for us a politics of the fresh start, a politics of hope."⁶⁸

In response, Dr. Harold Burkholder, former president of Grace Bible Institute and a beloved leader of the conservative evangelical wing of the church, offered a comment that was both contentious and conciliatory. On the one

Please make check payable to "Boehr For Representative."

☐ \$500 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$25

☐ Yes, I will pray for God's wisdom and protection for you and your family.

I can also help in the following ways...

☐ Host an event in my home ☐ Help with yard signs ☐ Make phone calls
☐ Help with mailings ☐ Arrange Speaking Engagements


Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Although Boehr ran in a strongly religious district, his religious platform did not sway the majority of the community to support him for representative.

hand, Burkholder was offended by Kreider's reference to the "angry radicals of the right." Kreider had "pulled his verbal sword from its sheath and drove it into the heart of Cedric Boehr and the conservatives who supported him." Mennonites, Burkholder wrote, should remember that their Anabaptist spiritual ancestors had been condemned as radicals in the sixteenth century. "As a conscientious objector to war, I am also committed to defending the right-to-life for the unborn, including those who may have deformities." On the other hand, Burkholder said it was time to "bury the hatchet." Ellen Samuelson, the duly elected representative in Topeka, could be assured "of our prayer support."⁶⁹

The concluding assessments by Kreider and Burkholder fulfilled an honored function for Mennonite elder statesmen. These leaders offered benedictions, seeking common ground on which to move forward. Yet everyone knew that the tensions between the dominant Mennonite denominational progressives and the minority Mennonite conservative evangelicals would not disappear. Seldom would those tensions play out as clearly in public as in 1994 in the seventy-fourth Kansas house district primary and general elections. 

67. William Vance Trollinger Jr., "Grace Bible Institute and the Advance of Fundamentalism among the Mennonites," *Mennonite Life* 53 (June 1998): 4.

68. *Newton Kansan*, November 11, 1994.

69. *Ibid.*, November 16, 1994.